

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Ryan Wilkinson. I am a resident of Middletown, CT, and I am a United States Marine Corps veteran and a registered republican.

I am testifying in support of a rent cap and in support of SB 4, with changes to better protect tenants.

In addition, I support amendments to lower the rent cap to 2.5% or 3%, as well as an amendment which removes section 3, subsection d, point 2, which creates an exception for tenants who are charged rent based on subsidy programs. This bill is meant to help people, and those struggling the most should not be excluded from benefiting from the bill.

I began living on my own in spring of 2019. I had just gotten out of an abusive marriage and was newly sober. I had been homeless for a time, and finally had found a roof to put over my head. Being a veteran, I was lucky enough to secure an apartment in a newly developed community specifically designed to assist chronically homeless veterans secure permanent housing and help transition them into “normal” housing. The space was more than I could have asked for given my situation.

In 2021, I was attending school full-time, pursuing a nursing degree. Unfortunately, the community I was living in had certain rules not common to a more conventional living space, and my education interfered with my housing. I was informed that I had to either drop out of school or move when my lease was up, something that my landlord had fought against, but could not overturn. I had no choice but to move to a new apartment.

Due to my low income, I was able to get connected with section 8 to have a portion of my rent subsidized. This was a blessing and I was able to save some money, which ultimately turned into one of two security deposits I needed to secure a new apartment. Section 8 housing came with a certain level of difficulty. I had to find an apartment which had a rent fee under a certain amount. I looked at dozens of apartments, and made a priority list, which I gave to the housing authority. The rent at all but my last choice was too high, which meant I either had to pay entirely out of pocket or move into my last choice apartment. Having little savings, I had no choice but to choose the later.

Aside from the concerning double security deposit requirement from the new apartment, it became very clear that the building and the landlord was going to be a problem. Upon entering my new apartment for the first time, it was obvious that little had been done to prepare the apartment for a new tenant. There was visible mold in the kitchen and bathroom, cracks and holes in all of the walls, indicating a potentially unstable building, and had not been cleaned at all. Stains covered the carpet and yellow streaks covered the bathroom walls.

Living in this environment throughout my first lease was difficult. The rent was expensive, and little to nothing was done when maintenance requests were submitted. Tenants' cars were towed arbitrarily and they were sometimes charged nearly half of their rent to get their

vehicle back. The property management company was more concerned with showing model apartments to potential new tenants than fixing current tenant maintenance issues.

In June of 2022, I was sent a lease renewal with a significant rent increase. Concerned about the increase, I reached out to my landlord inquiring why the rent went up, especially since they had not maintained the property in accordance with the lease. I received no response. I had previously been in contact with the property manager's supervisor to try and resolve some of the problems, so I asked the same question to her, and again received no response. The same situation occurred with her supervisor. I proceeded to try and track down her supervisor, with no avail. However, I was able to find the president of the company, and contacted her for answers. A week later, I received a response that stated they were not going to renew my lease, and offered to cover my August rent so I could afford a security deposit elsewhere and move out. I had already paid my August rent, and when I contacted her again, I received no response.

I reached out to any and all contacts I had following the end of my lease to determine the use and occupancy fees, as I was unable to afford to move, and had no choice but to stay at that apartment. I received no answers, and a few months later received a notice to quit for lapse of time. I luckily had access to VA funded lawyers, who were able to explain to the landlord that as a disabled veteran, it was not legal to evict me for lapse of time, and that a nonpayment eviction was irrelevant because I was willing and able to pay. After months of waiting on the landlord, I finally was able to sign a new lease, but still had no explanation for the raised rent.

The bill in question will eliminate almost all the problems I have encountered. A cap on rent increases will allow citizens who benefit from section 8 housing to have more options when moving, which creates competition in the market and moves the focus of landlords from rent prices to amenities, maintenance, and other quality of life aspects. A better quality of life means a happier populace, and a happier populace means a more successful state and country. Connecticut has been struggling, with businesses moving to more forgiving states who respect their workers and provide stable housing. The good faith eviction clause eliminates retaliatory evictions such as the one attempted on me. The amendment to eliminate the exception for those who are charged a subsidized rent protects and helps the least fortunate in our community. A chain is only as good as its weakest link, so if we can improve the absolute bottom of our society, we will improve as a whole.

Owning property is a great way to establish passive income, and can mean the difference between socioeconomic classes. However, giant property management companies plague American values by exploiting the poor for profit. As a disabled veteran, I was unable to get as much as a response to my genuine concerns as a tenant, and my landlord was able to do whatever they wanted to force me out. It took months to get them to agree to what they were legally obligated to do, and the delay hurt nobody but me. The company I rent from owns 64 properties. This monopolizes human life, and they are responsible for 19 properties in Connecticut. As tenants, we are treated like numbers, not people. Housing should not be an aggressive "for profit" entity. The individuals that work at a specific property should be afforded a salary sufficient to support their lives, but housing should not

support dozens of “administrative” jobs where Connecticut residents pay the college tuition of a Texas employee’s dependent. The level of benefits for someone who merely shows new tenants to their apartments should not be anywhere near that high.

This bill is not just important. It is a demonstration of how we as Americans treat each other and what we value. If you, as a member of this committee, value profit over human life, then vote in favor of this bill. If you put value in human life and the betterment of our state and our community, you have no choice but to support this bill. This bill embodies basic human rights, and our founding fathers would be appalled to think that this was even up for debate.

Respectfully,

Ryan Michael Wilkinson
Middletown, CT
USMC Veteran